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WINGATE'S RAIDERS

By
**CHARLES
J. ROLO**



CONDENSED FROM
THE ORIGINAL

General Wingate—Jungle Fighter



ONE of the most colorful figures in modern warfare, Major General Orde Charles Wingate was a throwback to the days when commanders charged into battle at the head of their men.

Wingate was a brigadier at 39. He was 41 and a major general when he was killed in an airplane crash in Burma in March, 1944. He had the eyes, beard and bearing of an Old Testament prophet, the cunning of a hunted fox and the endurance of an army mule. His orders, often couched in biblical language, and above all his personal magnetism, fired every man who served under him.

A distant relative of T. E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) Wingate became known as "the second Lawrence" after fantastic successes against marauding Arab bands financed by the Axis. In 1936 he won the Distinguished Service Order for leading the "special night squads" that cleared Palestine of Arab terrorists. In 1941 he was again decorated for organizing the Ethiopian "patriot revolt" in which with a handful of regulars and a few thousand tribesmen he killed or captured 40,000 Italians and entered Addis Ababa with Haile Selassie. But his most brilliant feat was his organization and leadership of the daring expedition of Wingate's Raiders that wrecked the Japanese communications system in northern Burma and set the pattern for jungle fighting.

For transport Wingate reverted to pack animals, elephants, mules and bullocks. His own communication lines were invulnerable because he had none in the orthodox sense. Every pound of supplies was dropped to the raiders from the air. Wingate commanded his widely dispersed columns from a radio mounted on a mule, and the radio provided his only contact with the outside world. With these tactics Wingate fought for three months against odds of more than ten to one, deep in enemy-occupied territory.

Wingate's Raiders

By CHARLES J. ROLO



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A plane took off on a strange mission . . .



Wingate had zest for action.

IN MAY, 1942, at the climax of the disastrous Burma campaign when the Allies were driven out of the country a Douglas transport took off from an airfield somewhere in India on a strange mission.

Its lone passenger was a 39-year-old brigadier general in the British army, Orde Charles Wingate, recently promoted from the rank of major. As a man, he was an eccentric, with the reforming zeal of an evangelist and the intellectual fervor of an Old Testament prophet.

As a soldier, Wingate was a specialist in the unorthodox, with a preference for unconventional methods and a touch of the bandit in his zest for violent action.

Now, his mission was nothing less than to size up the reasons for defeat, fathom the secrets of Japanese jungle warfare, and plan a campaign which would be the vanguard of reconquest of Burma when the time came.

In his headquarters in Assam, Wingate went quickly to work. He planned to lick the Japs and the jungle by a revolutionary system of training, transport, communication and supply. Since motorized transport had proved an impediment, he would revert to elephants, mules and bullocks. He would have no communication lines—all supplies would be dropped by plane to his men behind Jap lines!



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The more conventional military leaders were aghast. "It's a suicide show," they said. Wingate was a young upstart, a madman. But with the backing of Field Marshal Sir Archibald Wavell himself, Wingate went ahead, poring over maps and making his plans.

Odds and ends of manpower from a dozen regiments were all that could be allotted to him. As Wingate looked over the nondescript lot, he said: "I'll make any man that's fit a jungle fighter capable



He was staring into a panther's eyes.

of coping with the Japs' best."

The English soldiers were several thousand men from the smoky industrial regions of Britain. A force of Burma rifles was to be the eyes, ears and mouthpiece

of the expedition. The rest of his force consisted of Gurkhas, wiry, little hill fighters from Nepal.

It was this less than formidable force which Wingate hoped to lead through heavy jungle, far behind Jap lines in Burma to blow up the Burma railroad.

The expedition nearly ended immediately. When Wingate reached his training grounds, he decided to explore an ancient tower at dusk. He found himself staring into the eyes of a panther . . .

Fortunately, Wingate had his rifle with him when the male panther leaped out of the old tower. The intrepid brigadier-general killed the panther then and there and a few days later shot its mate.

Soon the intensive training of his men, whom he named *Chindits*, was under way. Their amazing plan to venture far behind Jap lines in the jungles of Burma called for rare courage and toughness. Wingate trained them mercilessly in a huge sand pit, covering every possible situation they might encounter.

His slogan for the force was: "We have to imitate Tarzan." He taught his men how to find their way through tangled forests, how to march silently, how to cover up their tracks and recognize landmarks. Wingate led them on forced



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He fired as the panther leaped.



The monsoon broke with great crashes of thunder.

marches until they could cover 40 miles a day with full equipment. All but the toughest were cut out.

Just after training started, the Indian monsoon broke with great crashes of thunder and mountainous black rain clouds. A river in the training area rose 30 feet and half of the force was trapped in treetops. Wingate swam across a mile of swirling water to make sure that everyone was safe.

On January 9, 1943, after months of grueling work, the expedition was ready to start. Special trains carried the Chindits to a railhead in the mountains of Assam, leaving them a march of 130 miles over passes 5,000 feet high to Imphal, close

to the Burma frontier, the point of assembly for the expedition.

Morale was high but every man could appreciate the terrific job ahead. The map showed that they must cross the Chindwin river where Japs already patrolled. They must force their way through fever-heavy jungles and swamps, avoiding the enemy, to the Burma railroad which they hoped to blow up.

Then they must continue on eastward, harassing the Jap at every turn, cutting his communications and gaining information for the future invasion of Burma. The route would take them far beyond the Irrawaddy river.

All this must be done—and they must



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get back—without supply lines. Everything would be dropped by parachute by the R.A.F.

Perhaps it was, as older officers said, a “suicide show.” But every Chindit was trained to a fine edge. A tougher, more confident lot would have been difficult to find anywhere . . .

Though Wingate's Raiders were eager to start on their spectacular foray against the Japs in Burma, it was touch and go at Imphal whether the expedition would be

the officers' mess; the expedition was on.

Someone produced a jar of rum and the Field Marshal proposed a toast.

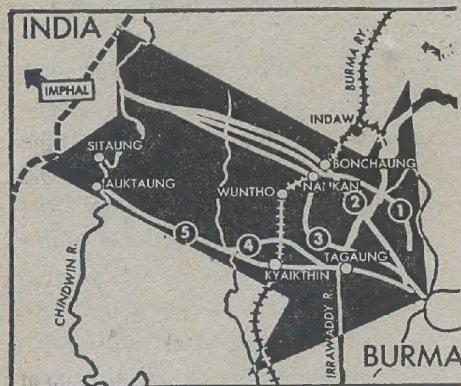
Wingate called his officers together and outlined the general military situation. He, himself, would lead the main body toward the Jap-held railroad. A smaller force would carry out a feint to the south.

Next day, just before setting out, Field Marshal Wavell addressed the force. “This is a great adventure,” he said. “It is not going to be an easy one. I wish you all the very best of luck.” Then he saluted the Chindits before they could salute him, a unique action.

It was an acknowledgment that this was one of the most dangerous ventures yet undertaken by the Allies. He knew, as every man did—that there would be times when the sick or wounded would have to be left behind to die.

The Chindits marched for two days along a wide plain, then the road spiraled steeply into the Manipur mountains. The Chindits, marching up, passed regular troops going in the opposite direction but so secret was the plan that none of the latter knew where the raiders were headed.

An Army captain spotted one of Wingate's liaison officers striding along in a



Map of routes for the five columns.

called off as too risky. Then on Feb. 5, 1943, Field Marshal Wavell and Lieut. Gen. Brehon Somervell of the U. S. Army conferred with Wingate. An hour later, the brigadier strode beaming into



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Wavell proposed a toast . . .



The huge beast crashed down the mountainside.

flight lieutenant's uniform with an infantry pack, Tommy gun and Commando knife. "What the devil do you think you are," he called, "Air Force, Army or Commando?"

"I'm a Dutch sub commander in disguise."

Two more days marching brought them to the Burma-Assam border where a signpost announced "West—6,000 miles to Blighty," and "Tokyo—3,000 miles East." Here, they shed all superfluous articles.

Heading for the Chindwin river, the column pushed on by moonlight. Elephants, carrying 800 pounds of equipment, were in the lead on the treacher-

ous mountain paths. Men and mules came after. The setting was eerie. Men jumped in the middle of the night march as the highpitched scream of an elephant told of a crumbling ledge. The huge beast crashed down the tree-spattered mountainside . . .

Men dashed after the squealing, trumpeting elephant as the beast crashed down the mountainside. Mercifully, a clump of bamboo broke his fall. A mahout and a British sergeant major coaxed him back up the mountain into line.

When dawn broke swiftly over the jungle, the column bivouacked for the day. Unshaven officers sat down on boulders for breakfast of bully beef and bis-



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cuits. Tea was made by a cook whom everyone called Fu Manchu.

Wingate, wearing his old sun helmet which he had had in Ethiopia, sat on a tree trunk. He drank tea from a battered tin mug and picked peaches from a can with his fingers. He watched the muleteers struggling with their charges.

"It takes high courage to lead an animal into action," he said. "The D.C.M. (Distinguished Service Medal) might well mean 'Died Chasing Mules.'"



They reached the border.

The Chindits checked their equipment. They wore regular tropical uniforms but were specially equipped with Australian-type slouch hats, anti-mosquito veils, razor-edged commando knives

and rubber-soled hockey boots for scouting and silent marching. Bedding was a waterproof ground sheet and a light wool blanket.

Every Raider also carried an aluminum mess-tin, a sterilizing outfit that would purify the foulest water, 50 rounds of ammunition and six days' paratroop rations—a 50-pound load all told.

It was next day when they reached the Chindwin. The crossing of the deep, half-mile-wide river was the first critical lap in the advance. The east bank of the river was usually heavily-patrolled by the Japs. If the enemy got wind of the advance, they could oppose the crossing.

With the greatest secrecy, Wingate's scouts got friendly Burmese villagers to assemble a flotilla of dugouts. The crossing started under a full Burma moon.

It was a fantastic scene. Half-naked men fought madly with plunging mules who refused to go down the steep, slippery banks into the dark and muddy waters. The first men over lit a small fire on the east bank to serve as a guiding light and Wingate's muleteers finally adopted the expedient of tying each mule to the back of a canoe.

Men were in the river and on the banks when keen ears caught the hum of planes.



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Men fought madly with plunging mules.



The planes . . . were they Japs?

Were they Japs? Those on the banks dropped flat and the mules stood still as the planes came on . . .

The mysterious planes swooped low over the Chindits crossing the river. If they were Japs, it might mean the end of the expedition. Then a light flashed from the leading plane—a recognition signal. Relief swept the raiders' ranks. It was the R.A.F.

As the sun rose, the crossing went on. Elephants, their mahouts still riding their necks, plowed majestically through the water. Shaven-headed little Gurkhas loaded Bren guns and mortars into wobbly dugouts.

Wingate, without a moment's rest,

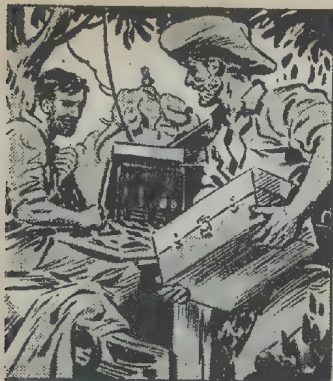
rode up and down supervising the crossing. Then he tossed his helmet into the last canoe, peeled off his outer clothing and plunged into the yellow-brown, swirling water. A few minutes later, the signal light on the east bank blinked for the last time and went out.

Two Tommies sat watching the weird assortment of animals clambering up the banks of the Chindwin. "Looks like Noah's Ark," said one disgustedly. "Not 'arf," said the other. "We only need a couple of penguins to complete the ruddy zoo."

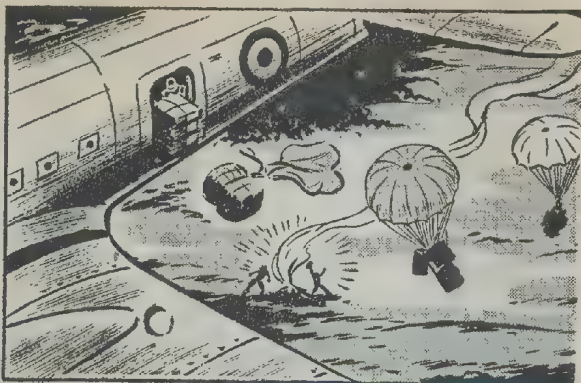
The raiders moved onward another eight miles into the jungle on the other side of the river and now came the first



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A sergeant set up the radio.



There was the sharp "phut, phut," of parachutes opening.

test of Wingate's amazing plan. He had envisioned the first major force to operate without supply lines—everything would be dropped by parachute after arrangements were made over the portable wireless.

But would it work? Would the wireless code message get through to the base? Could planes find the jungle clearing selected and drop supplies accurately?

A sergeant mounted the radio set on a teak log and strung the aerial to a treetop. The set, operating on batteries, hummed as he made contact with the base and described the exact location of the supply-dropping site, a strip of marshy elephant grass with a middle clearing.

They waited tensely. Now they knew, at least, that the message had been received. The next night, at the aerial rendezvous, men marked out the dropping space with marker fires.

When they caught the sound of planes, a sergeant fired off green Verey light flares to guide the pilots. Three huge D.C.'s circled the spot marked off by fires and zoomed down. In the planes, men heaved out their burdens.

There was the sharp "phut, phut" of parachutes snapping open. Then the wicker containers landed with a gentle clank . . .

As the plan of dropping supplies by parachute showed itself to be feasible, one



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The traitorous native listened . . .



Capt. Weatherall's men ambushed a Jap patrol.

section of Brig. Gen. Wingate's force struck south to act as a decoy group. They would divert the Japs from the main body of the expedition and deceive the enemy into believing that the British were driving in force toward the lower Chindwin.

Major John B. Jefferies, a bearded husky, led one group toward a village whose headman was known to be pro-Japanese. Near the village, Jefferies fixed himself up as a general and his men as staff officers. Then they entered the headman's house, telling him that he and his family could remain.

While the traitorous headman listened eagerly, Jefferies held a conference which

indicated that this was the headquarters for a large expedition heading south.

He pored over maps and dictated orders to mythical battalions. His "officers" hurried in and out with messages. The acting was good and the actors enjoyed the play. One officer handed Jefferies a message which said, "You have been invited to dine with Lady Snodgrass, 8 p.m., February 25. Black tie. The old harpie has been told you're coming."

At last Jefferies ended the act, confident that the headman quickly would inform the Japanese of what he thought was a powerful force. The party marched off with great dignity.

A forward party under Captain Vivy-



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an Weatherall was the first to draw blood. Picking their way through the jungle, Weatherall's men ambushed a Jap patrol about twenty strong, marching jauntily along a track. The Raiders were on their toes and picked off seven Japs without suffering any casualties. The Japs, the Chindits were discovering, though individually good soldiers were particularly sneaky about their reconnaissance.

Time and again, Wingate's men ambushed them sauntering through the

larger British force and help blow up the railroad. But the small group had exhausted its supply of food and had no wireless to call for additional supplies.

They decided to raid a village. Jefferies and three men crawled to the spot where they could see smoke and what looked like Japs. Jefferies whispered, "Get ready to rush them..."

Gripping grenades and rifles, they shot out of the ditch with what they hoped were blood-curdling cries.

Sitting around a small fire, placidly eating their supper, were five Burmese woodcutters. They gaped at the raiders, then politely held out a dish of rice.

The village was the headquarters of a Jap garrison of 50 men who at the moment were away hunting for the Raiders. The villagers were glad to hand over curried fish, chicken and vegetables which they had been cooking for the Japs' dinner and Wingate's men cleaned the larder.

The deception group pushed on, hoping to rejoin the main body of the expedition. Densely matted undergrowth slowed them in hellish jungle. In parts the jungle was so thick and steep they had to build a path for the mules and sometimes they had to unload the animals and man-



"Get ready," he whispered

jungle with their rifles slung over their shoulders as though they were taking a walk in Tokyo.

Now the Jefferies party pushed on eastward, hoping to catch up with the



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Raiders shot out of the ditch . . .

The trail was so bad they had to manhandle the packs.

handle the packs.

Now they were going on a few handfuls of sour rice a day. Some of the men chewed on dry jungle roots, not sure whether they were poisonous but in no position to be fussy. Just before dusk on the third day, they came upon a small patch of bamboo forest on the top of a hill.

The party had been without a drop of water for 36 hours. It spent the last hour of daylight slitting open hollow bamboos to see if there was any liquid in them. They were dry as a bone.

The hillside dropped steeply into a narrow valley and all the next morning they hunted a way down for the mules.

Eventually, the men handled the packs and the mules slid down on their haunches. That day they were desperate for water and an hour before dark they found a stream.

It was beautifully cool and clear. The men drank like camels, then bathed. They watered the mules and slept until dawn.

The party was now two days behind schedule. By forced marching, one day was made up but they just missed the column which had received supplies by air and moved on. The starving men searched the dropping area and found a dozen packages of dates, ate them and plunged forward.

They found the main body just three



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miles from the Kyaikthin station on the Burma railroad. Soon they were scheduled to blow up the line . . .

Different parties of Wingate's Raiders were converging on the Jap-held Burma railroad at widely scattered points. The main job of demolition, which involved destroying a key section of the railway and three steel bridges, was assigned to a group commanded by Major Michael Calvert, Royal Engineers.

The Major, also known as "Mad



They hunted a path for the mules.

Mike," was a former boxing and swimming champion. He was short and powerfully built and was a professional wrecker, an artist whose eyes took on a holy look as he told of dynamiting

bridges. He handled his explosives with loving care on the long trek to the railroad.

Calvert's section of Burma Rifles was commanded by Capt. Taffy Griffiths, a terrifying spectacle in a full beard and huge mustache. Also in the group was Lieut. Geoffrey Lockett who besides having a beard, insisted on fighting the campaign in kilts.

When a scout reported a Jap patrol, about forty strong, was in the valley in front of them, Calvert decided it would be a good time to draw blood. Leaving a small protective force to guard the mules and heavy equipment, he pushed off into the jungle to ambush the Japs.

The officer in charge of the protective force had orders to leave at 8 p.m. that night and meet Calvert at a pre-arranged rendezvous. He sent out two patrols to make sure his force would not be surprised but at dusk one patrol had failed to return.

It was a ticklish situation. If the protective force waited, it might be trapped. Yet, to abandon the patrol seemed unnecessarily harsh. It was easy to get lost in the jungle. The patrol might be only a few hundred yards away and yet be unable to locate the bivouac. The officer de-



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He handled T.N.T. lovingly . . .



Wingate's men ran across the trail of an enemy party.

cided to give them an hour or two of daylight to find their way back.

The next morning, just as he was moving off, the patrol turned up. They had slept less than 500 yards away.

The group rejoined Calvert at the rendezvous and learned that he had failed to contact the Japs, who had moved off to the south. At this point, they picked up a wireless message from Wingate, "Fear you are on a wild-goose chase," and ordering them to join him.

With tea and paratroop rations, Calvert's men set out. A night's marching brought them within a few miles of the place where they were to meet Wingate. Then their patrol ran across the tracks of

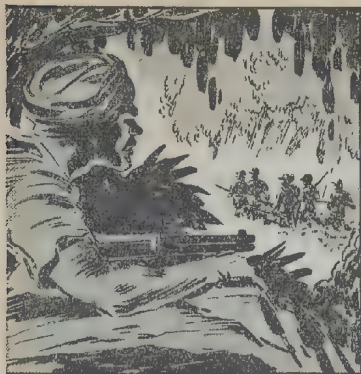
a Jap party of about 60 men . . .

Some of Wingate's Raiders who were expert at tracking dropped to the ground to examine the markings that had been found. They were always able to recognize the footprints of the Japanese by the small size of the boot, the rounded heel and distinctive pattern of the studs.

When Wingate arrived on the scene, the general gave orders to avoid clashes and move on the railway they planned to blow up. Already, Wingate seemed to be raking on the characteristics of the wild beasts that prowled the jungle. He marched with his head sunk forward like a panther's and his beard was shaggy as a lion's mane.



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A scout saw a Jap patrol.



To hide their tracks, the Raiders marched up a small river . . .

It was important not to leave tracks toward the railroad and the raiders marched up a *chaung* (small river) with water over their shins. It was hard going. The men kept bruising their ankles against boulders and there were nasty stretches of rock where they had to unload the mules and man-handle the heavy equipment. Several men slipped into deep holes and had to be hauled out.

At last the Chindits came out on the railway line without sighting a Jap. Nankan station was entirely deserted. All around were scattered great teak logs and debris from the 1942 retreat—a rusty, crippled jeep and a wrecked locomotive.

Scouts reported that the Japs were

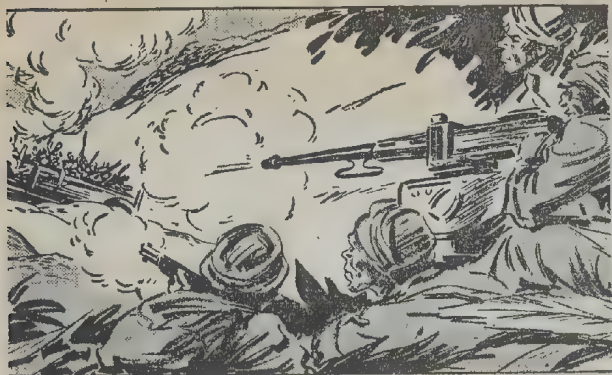
based in some strength at Indaw, 25 miles north, and Wuntho, 10 miles south. A new motor road from Indaw to Wuntho cut across the railway line just beside the station. The raiders had not bargained for the motor road but they hid parties armed with Bren guns and anti-tank rifles in the jungle beside the road.

Friendly Burmese villagers came out to have a look at the Chindits who were busily mining the railway. The villagers talked with the Burma Rifles about recent train movements and conditions in the neighborhood. Everything was extraordinarily peaceful.

The officer in charge looked at his watch. It was exactly 1:14. At 1:15 the



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Two truckloads of Japs came into Singh's ambush.



Singh sent a runner back.

battle of Nankan was under way. It began with startling suddenness.

Subadar (Warrant Officer) Kum Singh Gurung, the Gurkha officer in command of the party detailed to watch the motor road to the north had posted his men on the edge of the jungle.

Then two truckloads of Jap troops came lumbering down from Indaw, head on into Subadar Kum Singh's ambush...

The first burst of fire from the anti-tank rifle of Subadar Kum Singh's party killed half a dozen Japs as they jumped out of the trucks. But reinforcements for the Japs soon arrived and Kum Singh was heavily pressed.

He knew that if the Japs got past him

the work of the demolition squads on the railroad would be seriously jeopardized. Holding the enemy off with a deadly curtain of fire he sent a runner back for reinforcements.

Help immediately moved up and all afternoon Subadar Kum Singh held his ground. Around 3:30 there was a series of terrific explosions as the squads detonated their charges on the railroad. They had mined the line in seventy-five places. Six miles of railway and three bridges were a complete shambles.

"Mad Mike" Calvert, in tremendous spirits after the success of operations on the railway, decided to attack the Japs. He deployed his men in battle formation,



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laid on his mortars and opened up with a terrific burst of fire which caught the enemy unprepared.

The first mortar bomb scored a bull's eye on one of the enemy trucks, and the Japs didn't wait for any more. They broke and fled northward into the jungle, leaving behind a pile of dead.

Meanwhile, ten miles to the north, a party under Major Bernard Fergusson had been detailed to destroy the strategic Bonchaung Gorge bridge. The jaunty



The bridge hurtled skyward . . .

Fergusson, who sported a curly beard and a monocle, was enjoying his work hugely.

Fergusson's men had marched 300 miles with scarcely a break when Win-

gate ordered the attack on the railway. In just under three days, he led his party over the last critical stretch to the Bonchaung Gorge, between Nankan and Indaw, through sixty miles of mountain and thick jungle.

At Bonchaung station, charges were laid along 140 feet of the bridge, and farther on, in the cliffside overhanging the railway.

When the charges were touched off, tremendous explosions shook the earth and were heard ten miles south by Calvert's men. One particularly heavy charge started a landslide that brought hundreds of tons of earth and rock cascading onto the track.

As he watched fragments of the bridge hurtle skyward, Fergusson exclaimed happily, "All my life I've wanted to blow up bridges!"

But while Wingate's Raiders farther north were having great success in attacking the railway and beating off the Japs, the southern group of Major Jefferies was not so lucky. At 10:30 p.m., just as the Chindits were moving off to blow up the line, the enemy put in a surprise attack with two trainloads of troops.

It was a model attack carried out with great dash. The Japs closed in with mor-



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The Japs closed in with guns blazing . . .



He pulled the trigger . . .

tars and Tommy guns blazing, grenades exploding, and tracer bullets guiding their fire. They made a great hullabaloo with fire-crackers and wild battle cries.

The Chindits' mules stampeded, knocked over men and broke up parties assembled for the attack on the railway. Loads came unhooked and equipment was scattered in all directions as the animals galloped off. This was the first time that most of the Raiders' force had been under fire.

It was an ugly situation, but one that had been rehearsed time and again during the training period. The Chindits carried out a lightning dispersal into battle positions. Visibility was nil. Some parties of

Chindits and Japs lay a few feet from each other, firing blind at sound.

One Gurkha trooper bumped into a figure in the dark and gripped him by the hand. Simultaneously, the two men whispered a greeting—one in Gurkhali, the other in Japanese. The Gurkha's reaction was quicker. In a flash he shoved his rifle into the Jap's stomach and pulled the trigger.

Skirmishing and sniping continued all the next day while the Chindits, making the most of every scrap of cover in the thin jungle, assembled the mules and collected scattered equipment. Then small parties of Raiders crept down to the railway.



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At 3 a.m., the Jap commander heard a sharp explosion, then two more. The British had blown up the railroad right under his nose. They vanished, leaving no tracks, into the pathless jungle.

If the Japs hoped the Raiders now would return to India, they were due for a shock. Wingate's men continued pushing eastward. They stabbed deeper and deeper into enemy-occupied territory wiped-out Jap outposts, sabotaged military stores and put roads and bridges out



Raiders watched Japs searching.

of commission.

Often, the Chindits lay in the jungle by the side of the road, watching truck-loads of Japs tearing up and down looking for them...

Though they searched frantically for Wingate's Raiders, the harassed Japs seldom came upon them. The Brigadier's strategy was to attack the enemy only when and where it suited him.

"Fight when you have the advantage of surprise," he told his men. "When surprise is lost, break off the action. Never wait for the enemy to attack. Evade him."

Wingate had set no limit to the objectives of the expedition. His demolition experts were already thinking longingly of the great steel bridges on the Jap-held section of the Burma Road.

Casualties had so far been much lighter than Wingate had expected and the Chindits were standing up well to incredible hardships. Water was their greatest problem. It was the dry season and water was very scarce. What was worse, Wingate's men had to be wary of the obvious drinking places, since they often were Jap traps.

Occasionally, they ran out of sterilizing tablets, and after dark it was not only difficult to find water but harder still to know if it was fit to drink. Here the mules were a great help; mules are very fussy about their water. A pint-sized bottle kept the men going six hours in 90 degree temperatures.



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Drinking places were traps.



Raiders hurled blazing firebrands at the beasts.

Sometimes Chindits sucked the moisture out of the fleshy roots of jungle shrubs or drained the sap from thick creepers.

Wild animals were another source of worry. Most alarming was the trumpeting of elephants which meant either that the Chindits were close to a large enemy force, for the Japanese use elephants as pack animals, or that a herd of wild elephants, which might run amok and stampe the mules, was in the vicinity.

One party in bivouac fortunately had prepared piles of dry tinder when a herd of trumpeting elephants bore down. Quickly, the Raiders lighted crackling fires and hurled blazing firebrands at the

beasts who turned off. Wingate's men never ran into panthers or tigers in the jungle but often spotted their spoor tracks.

Several men had close shaves with king cobras. The king cobra is an extremely dangerous customer, with a very poisonous bite. As a party of raiders cut through the jungle a 15-foot giant reared up before one man. His head raised to one-third his length, the cobra swayed from side to side poised to strike . . .

Fortunately, the Chindit was both alert and armed. He swung his rifle over in a lightning movement and fired. The cobra fell writhing to the ground.

At the start of the campaign a number



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of men got bitten by scorpions, but they learned to be more careful. A scorpion bite made the victim very sick for a day, but doctors were on hand to give quick treatment and there were no deaths.

Food was the Chindits' only recreation and time of action told most heavily on their rations. Whenever a battle started, the men would think, "I'd hate to die with food in my pouch. If I don't stop one, I won't mind feeling hungry." At the first lull they would run riot on their



They found the officer tied.

rations. Then when the fighting was over, they would have to march on an empty stomach until the next dropping.

The funny man of the expedition was Sergeant Carey, a first-class soldier who

had served in China. When his column was particularly hungry, Carey would crumble a digestive biscuit on a teak leaf, drape a towel over his left arm and walk around murmuring in his best French accent, "Will Monsieur 'ave some pate de foie gras?"

Dorothy Lamour, too, did her bit to keep up the Chindits' morale. Scouts were always meeting Dorothy in the jungle and had a fine time spinning yarns about love with Lamour in the moonlight. One night, one of these encounters was being described to an appreciative audience when a piping voice cooed from the bushes: "I'm Dorothy Lamour. Anyone want me?"

A hulking private sidled coyly up to the campfire with a towel draped, sarong-fashion, about him.

These jokes may have been feeble but they were life-savers at the time. The men couldn't admit to themselves the possibility of not getting out alive. The hardest thing to fight down was the fear of being captured. The Japs wanted to find out about the expedition and the Chindits couldn't afford to think what they might do to prisoners.

They got one sample when they entered a village to find one of the Raiders'



WINGATE'S RAIDERS



Men got bitten by scorpions.



Gathered around the fire, the Chindits spun yarns . . .

officers dressed in Japanese clothes. He was tied to a post in the clearing. Apparently, he was in agony, his hands and feet were tied and he had a ghastly abdominal wound.

"Shoot me," he said quietly . . .

Fortunately, the Chindits who found the wounded officer had plenty of morphia. At least he died without pain. Still the Raiders continued to push on farther behind the Jap lines in Burma.

They kept going all out for the Irrawaddy river. The Japs were close behind. Marching through the hills, the Chindits heard the Japs put in a heavy mortar and machine gun attack on the bivouac they had just left.

"Lumme," someone cracked, "there goes my four-poster, silk sheets and all."

At 2 o'clock one morning, the Chindits came to a narrow strip of water, waded through it and found themselves in giant elephant grass. Officers and men were dead beat and flopped down in their tracks. None of them knew whether they had just crossed a stream or were on an island in the Irrawaddy and they were too tired to care.

At dawn they found that they were on a small island. They saddled up and were just moving off when they heard the crump, crump of mortars and the sharp hammer of machine guns, and the stuff came whistling over from the west bank



WINGATE'S RAIDERS



Japs put in a heavy attack . . .



The officers' chargers broke loose . . .

of the channel.

For two minutes there was unutterable confusion. An elephant was hit and went careering off into the long grass, trumpeting shrilly. The officers' chargers broke loose and swept through a mortar section knocking men and guns flying.

Several Raiders were hit. The rear guard got into action and started dropping mortar bombs right on top of the Japs. The enemy fire slackened and they pulled back some way into the jungle.

Major Calvert ordered his men down to the east tip of the island. "We've got to cross 1,200 yards of Irrawaddy," he said grimly, "and we've got to do it before they can bring up more troops. It's the

only way out."

At 12 noon, the column assembled for the crossing. The men were all a bit jumpy after being surprised and suffering their first battle casualties — seven dead and four wounded. Ahead lay a deep, swiftly-flowing river three-quarters of a mile wide. No one knew what lay on the other side.

Every man realized they might land in a Japanese trap. In fact, it looked very much as if they would. Five miles to the north they could see a Jap heliograph flashing signals into the sunlight . . .

Despite the ominous signal flashing, Wingate's Raiders were determined to cross the stream. They collected a few



WINGATE'S RAIDERS



The four wounded went over first.



He saw a tree crashing . . .

boats from villages on the island and the crossing got under way with agonizing slowness.

The round trip took forty-five minutes, an eternity to the men waiting their turn. Only a few loads had crossed when they heard the hum of planes. There wasn't a scrap of cover. They waited, paralyzed, staring into the sun.

Suddenly a cluster of silver shapes dipped out of the clouds and the Raiders caught the lovely roar of Rolls Royce engines ticking over. They counted three Hudsons and ten Hurricanes which must have just finished a supply dropping to a column in front. A Chindit shouted, "If ever I hear anyone say anything against

the R.A.F. I'll knock his damned block off."

As the planes disappeared, the Raiders saw another heartening sight, a small convoy of Burmese sailboats coming upstream. They hailed them and persuaded the owners to ferry them across. The four wounded went over first under the care of a doctor who operated immediately on a Gurkha.

The column, safely over, plunged into the jungle. They had marched for an hour when they ran into a half dozen bullock carts loaded with rice and potatoes for the Japs. A quick deal went through, silver rupees changed hands, and Private Tojo lost his food. That night the



WINGATE'S RAIDERS



Chindits had their first potatoes since entering Burma. They gloated over them like thirsty Cossacks over a bottle of vodka. They boiled them in their skins and even drank the water they had cooked them in.

It was about this time that Major Jefferies and Corporal Hayes underwent a weird experience. Becoming detached from the rest of the party, the men headed for a rendezvous. It was very sultry with a stifling heat wind and the grinding

about them, the men moved on. A little farther on in the middle of a thick teak jungle, they stopped in a clearing while Jefferies took a compass bearing.

There was a rending noise. Corporal Hayes shouted, "Look out, sir!" Jefferies saw an 80-foot teak tree crashing down on him . . .

As the huge teak tree came crashing down, Major Jefferies jumped. It hit the ground exactly where he had been standing. The wind was very light and the whole thing struck the men as very odd. Convinced that the place was haunted, they pushed on in a hurry.

Next morning they reached the rendezvous and joined up with the rest of the force. They discovered that during the attack on the railway, several men had had miraculous escapes. One private had the heel of his boot blown off by a mortar, got a bullet through his pack and another through his ammunition pouches—and wasn't scratched.

The Raiders cut their way still deeper into Jap-held Burma. They were on the bank of a stream when a Jap reconnaissance plane, the oldest crate they had ever seen, came flying slowly up and showered them with leaflets. It went stuttering along and disappeared in the heat haze.



Planes dipped out of the clouds . . .

tops of the tall bamboos made an eerie noise.

Above the creaking, the men heard a strange sound, like native music on a crude reed pipe. Casting uneasy glances



WINGATE'S RAIDERS



The Raiders lit signal fires . . .

The leaflets were printed in English, Urdu, Karenni, and Burmese and were addressed to "The pitiable Anglo-Indian Soldierier." They started, "You are a beaten army, surrender." They advised the native soldiers to desert and go to the Japs who would treat them kindly. One little Gurkha muttered scornfully, "Private Tojo dirty liar."

The column of Raiders had scheduled a supply dropping and was bivouacked on the east bank of the Irrawaddy when it heard the faint hum of planes approaching from the west. The men tore down to the sandbanks and lit fires quicker than a bunch of super boy scouts.

The planes flew past and the men



The parachutes began drifting into the river.

thought they had failed to spot the fires. They had done some fancy swearing at the pilots when they saw them circling back.

Neatly grouped over the sandbanks, the first dozen parachute loads drifted down. The Raiders were so hungry that they started cooking a cheese and biscuit "souffle" over the fires while the planes were still dropping supplies.

Unfortunately, a wind got up before the third plane had unloaded and the parachutes began to drift into the river. There was nothing for it but to cancel the rest of the dropping.

The men advanced eastward and at last found a good spot for a new supply drop-



WINGATE'S RAIDERS



ping. By this time they were absolutely fed up with biscuits and wirelessly to India, "Oh, Lord, give us bread." Back came a message, "The Lord hath heard thy prayer." The planes came over next day and lo and behold, down tumbled 60 loaves from the heavens . . .

One of the major objectives of the Wingate expedition was to sound out feeling among the Burmese, enlist their sympathies, and strengthen their confidence in an Allied victory.



The officer was surrounded.

Japanese rule in Burma was following the usual Axis pattern. Headmen were summoned once or twice a month to Japanese headquarters and given their

orders. They were expected to provide labor to build roads and bridges and always to have on hand enough chickens and rice for a patrol of fifty men.

Periodically, Japanese patrols, usually commanded by non-commissioned officers, would check up on each village to see that orders were carried out and to extort taxes in the form of more food and labor. When the N.C.O. in charge was dissatisfied, the headman was shot and the village burned down. The Japs knew no other method.

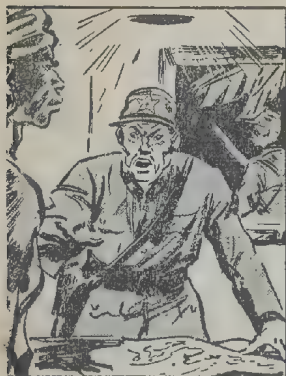
Wherever Wingate went, he heard the same complaint: "No salt, no cloth, no doctors." In one village, the Brigadier noticed vaccination marks on a man's arm, and asked who had done it. "That was done two years ago," the man replied, "by the government." Burmese always described the British thus.

At every unoccupied village along the line of advance, Wingate paused long enough to broadcast a manifesto and distribute leaflets which said that eventually the British would rid Burma of the "fierce, scowling Japanese."

At many villages, the leaders would take Wingate and his party to the temple where a gift of bananas had been laid out for them. Wingate always returned the



WINGATE'S RAIDERS



Japs gave their orders.



If they protested, the chief was shot and the village burned.

compliment by contributing a bag of rupees to the temple fund.

One of Wingate's aides, Captain Aung Thin, an Oxford-educated Burmese, acted as the brigadier's spokesman on these occasions. He usually received a friendly response, although the villagers had been warned against assisting the British on pain of death and wholesale reprisals. They had been promised rewards if they killed or took prisoner any members of the expedition.

It was clear to Wingate's men that the people of northern Burma were beginning to dislike their Jap masters pretty heartily. Then Captain Aung Thin had a strange experience when he entered a

village alone.

The British officer was quickly surrounded by a band of villagers armed with sticks and *dahs*, long Burmese swords. Villagers demanded fiercely: "Do you work for the British or Japanese?"

As the howling villagers crowded about with their clubs and swords, Captain Aung Thin knew he was in immediate danger of death. But he raised a hand and said, "Peace be unto you, friends, I am a Burman like yourselves. I fight on the side of the British to free Burma from the Japanese. I come with good will for your help and assistance. If I gain it, I will reward you."

The villagers suddenly were friendly



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and supplied him with food and all the information he needed. They revealed that the Japs had issued orders that if five or fewer British troops were to enter a village, they must be attacked and overpowered. If a greater number, they must be given to believe they were safe while information was sent to the Japs.

But never were the Chindits betrayed in this way. Many brave Burmese even lied to the Japs about the Raiders' whereabouts.



His grenade dropped into the fire.

Wingate's column advanced eastward, continuing its propaganda work in the villages. The Japs by now were swarming over the countryside like flies, and not a day went by without a scrap. One morn-

ing, one of Wingate's raiding parties spotted a Japanese patrol standing beside a truck in the middle of a village.

The Chindits sneaked up and rushed the Japs with fixed bayonets. Only one escaped; he jumped into the driver's seat, flung the truck into gear, and drove away in a cloud of dust.

Another time, Wingate sent a British scout to reconnoiter a village after dark. The scout saw a group of men squatting around a campfire. He mustered his few words of Burmese and asked: "Are there any Japanese here?"

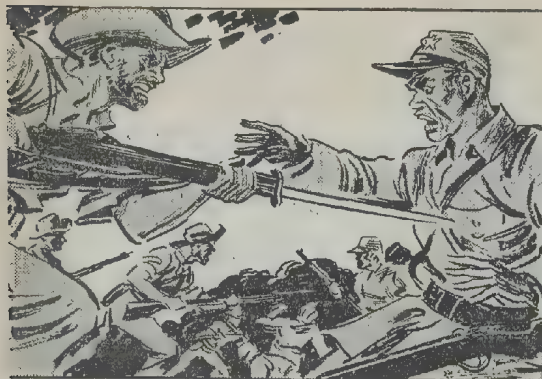
The men stared at him blankly and he realized they were Japs. He pulled the pin out of his grenade and tossed it into the middle of the fire. Then he ran back to report that there no longer were any Japs in the village.

In one jungle scrap, a section of Gurkhas saw their British officer shot. One of them at once rushed the Jap commander and had him down in a flash. He killed him with his dagger and then he dragged the body back, laying it carefully at the feet of the dead British officer.

Whenever there was a stream to cross, it meant a fight. Fergusson was crossing the Irrawaddy when the Japs came up. The major himself commanded the rear-



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Chindits sneaked up and rushed the Japs with bayonets . . . The Gurkha rushed the Jap.

guard action and clung to the last boat as it pulled out with bullets whistling around him.

Wingate's Raiders by now were dangerously far into Burma and the odds against their getting out alive grew increasingly slim. Japs were everywhere and making an all-out effort to destroy the Chindits.

Major Jefferies' party took a badly-needed supply dropping of boots, uniforms, ammunition, rations and rum. They had just finished a meal when the patrol reported that the enemy was approaching in force. What food the men could not carry was hastily cached in the bushes. The rum was reluctantly tipped

out of the one-gallon glass jars.

"Struth," one Raider muttered bitterly, "if we ever get back to tell this story nobody will even believe it."

The Chindits had a stiff tussle to get the mules going but finally pushed off. They hadn't gone very far when Jap mortars started shelling the bivouac they had just left behind. It was hoped the Japs wouldn't find the food.

Now, as the Raiders stumbled through the jungle, enemy parties probed for them like sappers for a mine. All talking was forbidden. At this point, one of the Madrasi cooks who at the last mail drop had received bad news from home, cracked under the strain and started



WINGATE'S RAIDERS



They heard mortars shelling the bivouac.



He leaped into the undergrowth . . .

chanting native hymns. He marched along in a trance and nothing could silence him.

That night he vanished into the jungle. Jefferies was reluctant to leave him to the Japs; he had shown great bravery during the campaign and had been recommended for a decoration. At dawn, they hunted around for an hour and found him sitting beside a clump of bamboo, completely shell-shocked, dolefully mumbling prayers. They pulled him to his feet and led him back into line. In a few days, he was normal again.

Then one of the mule leaders suddenly came face to face with a red-capped Japanese officer, probably a brigadier, sitting

in a bamboo shelter by the side of the trail. They saw each other at the same time. The Englishman reached for his revolver, but the Jap spun around and leapt into the undergrowth yelling: "Whee, whee, British!"

When the column at last made the rendezvous with Brigade headquarters, Wingate greeted Jefferies with shattering news: the force had just received orders to return to India. The main objectives of the expedition had been accomplished and the monsoon season, which breaks earlier in Burma than in India, was drawing near . . .

Wingate's Raiders got another load of supplies by air at their positions far be-



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The runner coolly aimed at the Japs.



They charged to their death.

hind Japanese lines in Burma. Several special items had been requested, including a box of snuff, boots and curry powder for the Gurkhas.

The Gurkhas had been looking forward all day to their curry and foraged among the cannisters until they found it. They bore it off in triumph and began cooking then and there. Meanwhile, the officer who had ordered snuff went poking among the cannisters:

"Dammit," he said to another officer, "I can't find my snuff." Suddenly, the ghastly truth dawned upon both of them. "The Gurkhas and their damned curry!" the officer shouted. He rushed over, but it was too late. The "curry" was nicely

done and several indignant Gurkhas were already choking over the first frightful mouthfuls.

That evening, the column reached the Nam-mit river. Twelve Burma Rifles and a British lieutenant waded the stream and cautiously approached a village. Natives warned them that a patrol of sixty Japs was in the village and two runners were sent back for reinforcements.

On the way, the runners bumped into an enemy scouting party of about twenty men. One of them made a dash for it with the message, the other dodged behind a tree and at point blank range coolly aimed twelve shots at the Japs. Two dropped a few yards away from him, and



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They wirelessly to the base.



At the river, the Raiders signaled sailboats.

he didn't have time to count how many more he had hit. When he turned up at the bivouac, he reported two killed. Later, the main column discovered seven bodies on the trail.

Learning of the Japs' moves, Wingate's Raiders laid an ambush into which 36 Japs marched along a dusty road. When the lieutenant gave the order to fire, a British sergeant yelled to his front Tommy gun man:

"T-there you are, my b-b-boy, there's a b-b-birthday for you!" The Japs were taken completely by surprise. This wasn't in their book of rules, and they lost their heads. Instead of scattering they dropped to their knees on the road and started fir-

ing blindly into the jungle in all directions. They were a sitting target.

The first volley from the Raiders killed twenty of them. The survivors did the only thing the Japs know how to do when they're caught off guard. They fixed bayonets and charged straight to their death. The Tommy gunners wiped them out. Not a single one escaped . . .

As various groups of Wingate's Raiders headed back for India, the Japs redoubled their efforts to cut them off. Enemy garrisons, they learned, were a battalion strong in all the larger villages. Natives reported that 700 Japs had been brought up from Mandalay to Myitson to encircle the Chindits from the east.



WINGATE'S RAIDERS



Wingate explained his plan of retreat.



He struggled with a grenade.

They wirelessly this information to the R.A.F. base at Assam and British planes bombed the Japs within seven hours of their arrival. It was before they had time to dig trenches and 200 casualties were inflicted.

Wingate's orders were to ditch equipment and save personnel. "We can get new equipment and wireless sets," he said, "but it will take us twenty-five years to get another man. These men have done their job. Their experience is at a premium."

Calvert led the first party out. "Provided we keep moving," he said to his men, "and keep our heads, we'll make it. If we have to fight to get food, I've every

intention of doing so. If we bump any Japs, the order is: fly at their throats."

The column had its quota of mules but before it reached the Irrawaddy river most of them were so badly galled that Calvert ordered them to be shot. One mule, "Yankee," was still in good shape and the British were determined to bring him out alive.

Officers reckoned that the Japs would expect them to take the shortest route home so they decided to make a detour that would bring them down to the Irrawaddy at a more southern point.

When they reached the river a number of small sailboats were moving upstream and Raiders signaled them to pull in to



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shore. There they bought their cargoes of rice and tomatoes and the boatmen agreed to ferry them over the Irrawaddy for two rupees a head.

There was so much traffic on the river that the Raiders thought they might get across unnoticed. It worked. They crossed in the afternoon, towing Yankee behind a boat. Though the Japs were within two miles of them to the north and south, they failed to spot them.

But now, really tough jungle faced

ties to the jungle. There were more to come . . .

Wingate, himself, now had concentrated under him a large force which he must lead back through the Jap lines to India and safety. Major Jefferies found the brigadier pacing up and down the bed of a dry chaung, analyzing the position. The Japs had drawn a tight net about them and one patrol had just reported that the enemy knew to within a few miles what area the force was in. Wingate realized that getting out of Burma would make the march in seem like a stroll in St. James' park.

"Just put yourself in the position of the Jap commander," he said to Jefferies. "Your one aim will be to prevent anyone from getting out alive. You've been made to look very stupid. Your superior officers are storming: 'Are you going to let these appalling conditions continue?' There's only one way you can save face, and that's by annihilating the whole expedition. Yes, we can take it for granted that from now on the Jap commander is going to do everything in his power to wipe us out. And the first thing he'll do is make a very strong effort to prevent us from recrossing the Irrawaddy."

Wingate summoned his senior officers

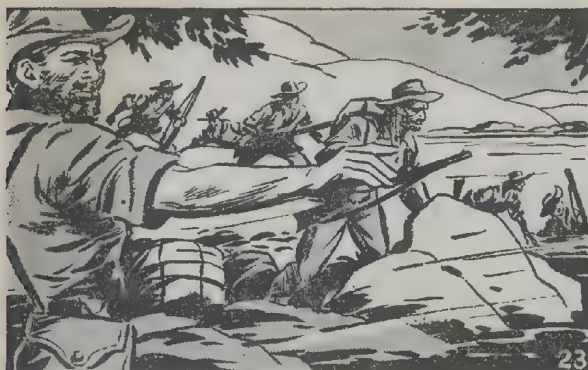


A Jap patrol attacked . . .

them. One stretch was so dense that a British trooper, who moved off 30 yards with a message, got lost and was never seen again. Men collapsed and had to be left behind. These were their first casual-



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The sand on the beach began spitting into the air.



Wingate stood like a prophet.

and explained his plan of retreat. For the sake of speed, they would shoot and eat their few remaining bullocks and would ditch half of their bedding.

The group started off and covered 40 miles in two days' marching. At one of their rest halts, a Japanese patrol attacked the tail of the force with mortars and Wingate detailed Major Fergusson's column to lead off the enemy.

Fergusson headed northeast making his tracks as conspicuous as possible. In the jungle near the village of Hintha he laid a dummy bivouac and abandoned various tempting articles of equipment with booby traps attached. Then he headed for the village where Japs were

likely to be, on the theory that a battle there would draw the enemy away from Wingate's force.

On the edge of the village, Fergusson stumbled upon four men. They were sitting about a fire as though it were a bridge table. The men looked up incuriously as Fergusson approached. The British officer tried one of his rare Burmese sentences: "What is the name of this village?"

He was merely trying to make conversation. But when the men did not respond, the thought came "Japs!" The enemy was more surprised than Fergusson. They were petrified. Fergusson struggled with the pin of a grenade...



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He lobbed the missile into the center of the fire where it exploded with a terrific roar. All four Japs fell over backward in perfect unison.

The ruse of drawing the enemy attacking force from the rear of Wingate's column had succeeded and now the brigadier led his men down to the Irrawaddy river for the homeward crossing. They assembled just before dawn for the dangerous undertaking.

Quickly and silently, men began to



He lobbed the missile into the fire.

load the mules. Every now and then they would glance anxiously up and down the river or pause to listen to a sound from the jungle. A zero-hour mood hung over the column. The men realized that this

was a crucial point in the get-out. No one dared hope for an easy crossing.

The sun rose blood red in a very pale blue sky. The morning air was almost cold. The whole scene seemed unnaturally peaceful. Major Jefferies, supervising the crossing, saw the first dugout push off. Then suddenly, the sand on the beach began spitting into the air.

Jefferies flattened behind a sandbank and whipped out his field glasses. On the west bank he saw a large body of Japs. He suddenly felt slightly sick. What he knew would happen, had happened.

The enemy seemed to be in fairly large numbers on the west bank, but most of his machine gun and small arms fire was falling short. Wingate quickly put his mortars into action and the second burst found the range. The Japs raised their sights, too far this time, and began firing over the Chindits' heads.

Jefferies stood beside Wingate on the beach with bullets flying around them, hoping that the brigadier would break into an undignified double. He did nothing of the kind. He stood there like some minor prophet with his huge beard and with a blanket draped around his shoulders. Then he walked slowly toward the jungle.



WINGATE'S RAIDERS



The wounded hobbled toward the plane.



The plane labored heavily . . .

"The Japs are in some strength behind us to the east and may be down on us at any minute," he said. "They are in considerable strength on the other side. We've got to make ourselves pretty scarce and quickly.

"Get all the officers into that dip over there and I'll give them instructions . . ."

Now that the immediate crossing of the Irrawaddy was impossible, Wingate's plan was for the columns to part company, move back into the jungle until they had given the Japs the slip, then make their way out of Burma by whatever route seemed safest.

One column saw its last mule die. Since the animal carried the heavy radio

set, they wirelessly for a last supply drop, then smashed the set and buried it. They were pleasantly amazed on reaching the dropping rendezvous to find what was probably the only large patch of grass-land in northern Burma.

The column had many sick and wounded men who would never get back to India on foot. Rescue by air was their only hope of life. The major in charge called his sergeant.

"Tell the men to tear some parachutes into strips and then spell out the words: PLANE LAND HERE NOW."

On Sunday, the planes came over and dropped supplies. They picked up the message and one tried to land. Rough turf



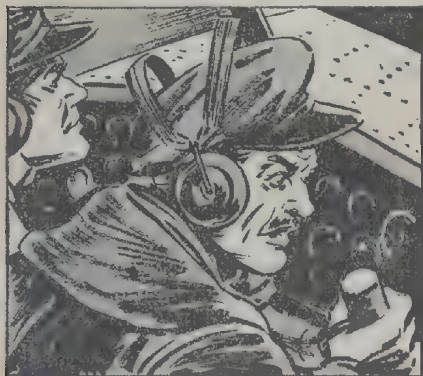
WINGATE'S RAIDERS



scarred with potholes flashed past the windows. The pilot cursed into the roar of the motor and climbed back up.

Back at base he reported: "It can be done if they mark off a runway." Off went another plane with a message: "Mark out 1,200-yard landing ground to hold 12-ton transport." At dawn next day, the rescue plane took off with Flying Officer Michael Vlasto at the controls.

At the site, Vlasto spotted a white line



The pilot listened for the crash.

across the field and the message: "Land on line. Ground there V. G." The line was 400 yards too short for comfort but Vlasto came in, just missing the tall teak forest which encircled the field.

A band of hillbilly assassins crowded happily around the plane. The 18 sick and wounded filed out and hobbled toward the plane. Some had to be supported. For them it was a reprieve from certain death. But at the plane steps, the 18th man turned and said, "I came in on my feet and I'd like to go out the same way."

"Good man," the major smiled. No. 18 joined the group posing for a farewell picture. The Chindits waved their hats and "cheered" silently as the plane taxied off. The motors hummed.

The plane lifted slowly, laboring heavily. In the cockpit, the pilot and copilot sat, dead white, with their gaze glued on the teak trees rushing toward the windshield. They were heading into the top branches...

The pilot was listening for the plane to crash into the tree-tops when the craft heaved and bounced upward. A frantic lift and over she went. There were just six inches to spare.

Wingate now decided to break up the force remaining under him into small parties, each about forty strong. Under the old military principle of "scatter to live" these groups were to fade into the jungle, cross the Irrawaddy at widely separated points and make their way sin-



WINGATE'S RAIDERS



Raiders smashed and buried the supplies.



Every boat had been wrecked . . .

gly back to India.

"Whatever you do," he counseled, "keep on the move."

Wingate led his own group off in search of a safe bivouac where they could rest and feed up for the return journey. They sent off their final messages and then killed their mules which had carried the wireless sets and heavy equipment. For six days then they ate nothing but mule.

The Brigadier enforced rigid security measures. Fires were lit only for half an hour before dawn and half an hour after dusk because smoke hanging over the treetops might give them away in the daylight, whereas flames could be seen

for only a short distance through the jungle.

At last Wingate decided to make a second try at crossing the Irrawaddy. If all went well, the homeward march would take fourteen days; his party now had five days' paratroop rations apiece. Wingate jotted down in his notebook exactly what he would eat at each meal. On the way back he kept on consulting this notebook and would remark aloud: "Now I can have some chocolate . . . time for two biscuits."

Before leaving the bivouac the men smashed and buried the wireless sets, mortars and machine guns, keeping Tommy guns, rifles and grenades. From now on all



WINGATE'S RAIDERS



equipment would have to be man-handled every foot of the way. Ditching the wireless sets was the hardest blow of all. It gave the men a ghastly feeling to stand by watching the R.A.F. sergeant wrecking their last outside link.

They marched rapidly to the Irrawaddy, coming out onto the stream between Tigyain and Tagaung, twenty-five miles south of where they had first attempted to cross.

Every boat in sight had been wrecked



The native slyly lifted the floorboards.

by the Japanese in a determined effort to prevent the Chindits from re-crossing the river. Wingate's men collected three battered dugouts and started working feverishly to make them floatable. At any mo-

ment the Japs might come up . . .

The Japs had been too thorough about wrecking the dugouts. The Chindits went back into the jungle, lay up for twenty-four hours and then tried crossing in another place. This time there were no boats at all and Wingate, through his field glasses, spotted Japs on the west bank.

Again they marched back into the jungle, tired and very low in spirits. It began to look as though they would never get across. They spent that night in a sort of petrified forest of stunted trees and mulled over ways of getting back.

Just before noon, a patrol found a heavy dugout on a lake near the Irrawaddy and quickly carried it to the river. Wingate and his officers ran their glasses over the opposite bank. There were no Japs in sight.

Eight men had crossed when to their surprise the Chindits saw a boat heading upstream. Wingate hailed it. The boatman explained that the Japs had allowed him on the river because he was moving a corpse. Then he slyly lifted the floorboards and disclosed a cargo of tomatoes and salt under the corpse. Wingate bought the cargo and persuaded the boatman to dump the corpse and salt and ferry



WINGATE'S RAIDERS



When Japs fired he paddled upstream.



Villagers said the enemy was in strength . . .

them across.

Three-quarters of the party had safely reached the opposite bank when a Jap patrol spotted the boat and opened fire. The boatman quickly paddled upstream and the men on the east bank faded into the jungle. When the Japs had moved on, the boatman returned and finished the job.

Wingate's force was now on the island on which Calvert's column had fought a battle with the Japs on the way in. Jeffries felt that the worst was behind them and remarked jubilantly to Wingate, "I can just see myself sitting down to a bottle of champagne in Calcutta."

This remark enraged the Brigadier.

"You'd better realize John," he said angrily, "that the rest of this trip is going to be no picnic. Concentrate on getting out alive."

At this point, villagers informed them that the Japanese were in great strength three miles to the north. After crossing the channel from the island to the mainland, Wingate's men set off along a rough jungle trail pitted with great holes five or six feet deep.

They had not gone very far when Wingate saw a burning torch coming toward them. It was no more than thirty yards away. In a flash the Chindits dived into fire positions at the side of the trail and waited tensely . . .



WINGATE'S RAIDERS



The ghostly torch crept forward unbearably slowly. Then the Chindits could see the bearer. He was a Burmese with a party of natives. Those Burmese had no idea how near they came to being riddled with bullets. Every one of Wingate's men had taken first pressure on his rifle.

The Chindits reformed and moved off along the jungle track. A two days' march brought them to the next great hazard—the railway. By now it was heavily patrolled by Japs. Thick jungle ex-



Beyond lay one more river.

tended to within ten yards of the railway on either side. Somehow or other they would have to cover 20 yards of open ground across the railway without being spotted. Scouts reported the Japs were

stationed 400 yards to their right and to their left.

At the edge of the jungle they halted. Again it was like getting set to go over the top. Beyond the railway lay one more river—the Chindwin—then home. Wingate whispered softly: "Here we go." Bunched closely together they stole swiftly across the gap and disappeared into the jungle on the other side. The railway was behind them.

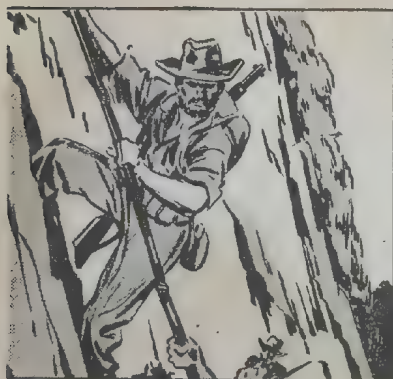
The Brigadier urged them forward at top speed and did not say a word until they had put five miles between themselves and the line. Then he halted for a breather. "We can thank the Japanese for one thing," he said. "That was disgustingly bad patrol work. We should never have got through."

The Chindits now marched for several days through the Mingin mountains. At one point they had to make ropes of their rifle slings to get down a 20-foot drop. They were so tired they stumbled over stones and boulders and most of them were badly bruised.

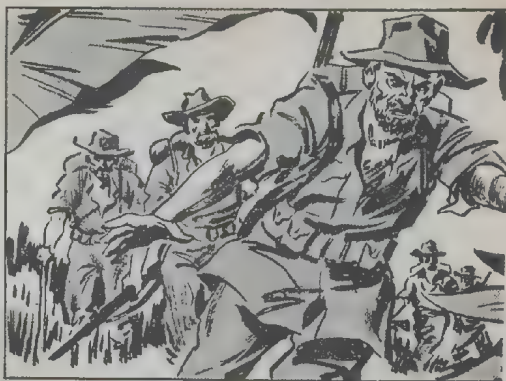
By now all their paratroop rations were exhausted and they had nothing left but rice. The Burma Rifles picked jungle roots which they chewed or made into soup but it was poor stuff to march on.



WINGATE'S RAIDERS



They made ropes of rifle slings . . .



The stricken had to be left to die.

Every man was haunted by the fear of falling sick. Usually the stricken just crumpled up in their tracks and there was the grim business of making them as comfortable as possible and leaving them behind to die.

One British lieutenant just couldn't march another step. He dropped, muttering, "Well I've had it." Wingate halted and talked to him gently. When he turned to go, the lieutenant rose shakily to his feet and saluted with a cheery smile.

Then he lay down and the dust settled over him as the column marched on . . .

The Chindits had set out strong, hearty, well-muscled. Now, with a few exceptions, their bodies were a shocking

sight, horribly emaciated. Wingate himself miraculously showed no signs of fatigue. He drove his men on with a cold unrelenting ferocity—to save them.

The ability to go on marching was not so much a question of toughness as of mental outlook. At this stage they kept going by sheer will power and faith in Wingate with the slogan, "The Brigadier will pull us through."

At dawn before anyone else was awake, Wingate would pad silently off into the jungle on solitary scouting patrols. On the march he led the way himself. Knowing that their only security lay in speed, he set a merciless pace and would keep looking back over his shoulder to see that



WINGATE'S RAIDERS



every man was in line.

The march to the Chindwin was the worst part of the whole campaign. For the first eight miles they waded waist deep in water along a fast-flowing *chaung*. Then as they approached the river, scouts brought word the Japs were everywhere. The strain was becoming unbearable.

Wingate pushed on. They had not gone far when they came to the worst tract of elephant grass they had encountered in Burma. The blades were stiff and sharp—more like wire than grass—and 15 feet high, matted at the bottom. The Chindits tried for three hours to push through with little headway.

The party flopped down exhausted. Next morning Wingate had a plan. He and the next four best swimmers would try to swim the Chindwin. If they made it, they would send British patrol boats back to pick up the others.

Wingate's party of five pushed off and battled for hours through the thick grass. According to their map, the grass ended several hundred yards short of the river and there would be a clear space through which they would have to run under possible Jap fire.

Suddenly Wingate let out a grunt of surprise. "Take a look at this," he said to

the men behind him. They squeezed forward. There, almost at their feet, lay the Chindwin. Mercifully, the map maker had slipped. No track. No Japs.

They discarded heavy equipment, cut their trousers into shorts and kept their rifles and packs. "Won't fight the current," Wingate said. "Good luck." He doubled down the bank with the others close behind . . .

The men plunged into the water, their last obstacle. After swimming 30 yards, Jefferies was forced to let go of his rifle and boots. Then about 100 yards from the bank the tattered shreds of his shirt sleeves wound themselves tightly around his arms and imprisoned them.

Jefferies kicked out furiously with his legs and drifted into midstream. A small wave hit him in the face and he swallowed several mouthfuls of muddy water. He began to sink. The idea of dying at this point enraged him. He kicked out savagely again and forged ahead slowly toward the bank. He grew feebler and felt terribly weary.

"At least it's going to be a pleasant way of dying," he said to himself. Then his feet touched bottom.

Wingate found him on the beach and shook his shoulder. "Come on, take cover.



WINGATE'S RAIDERS



The Japs may be here." Jefferies struggled to his feet and watched lazily as the Brigadier doubled up the beach in his bare feet. Suddenly, Wingate let out a fiendish yell and jumped back into the water. The others thought, "Japs!" Then they realized it was the red-hot sand which had roasted the Brigadier's bare feet.

Two hours later, five scarecrows, barefooted, heavily bearded and in rags tumbled into a tidy little jungle outpost where a group of British officers were drinking tea.

The Chindits were welcomed royally and given hot, sweet tea, bully beef stew, rum and cigarettes. With the tension gone, dead weariness set in. But when a patrol was organized to cross the Chindwin with enough boats to pick up the rest of the party, Wingate stood up and said quietly, "I'm going along with them."

At dusk, Wingate and the others moved to the rendezvous and waited for a signal. Just then they heard the sound of a Jap patrol pushing through the elephant grass on the opposite bank. A moment later the signal came.

Wingate's torch flashed an answer and the rescue party shot down into the boats. The Japs opened up with a mortar but

the boats got across safely. The Chindits piled in and the tiny flotilla started back. When they were in midstream the Jap mortar again went into action, but its fire was wide of the mark. From the west



Wingate found him on the beach.

bank a familiar sound welcomed them home—the sharp, sustained rattle of Bren guns raking the enemy. Then the mortar was silent.

Out of the shadows a bearded figure in an old pith helmet rose from the sandbank to greet them . . .

Wingate guided the party up to the forward post where trestle-tables had been laid out, candles lit and a feast prepared for them. There were large bowls of fruit and cans of rich, sweet condensed



WINGATE'S RAIDERS



milk, for which every man had longed for weeks. That night, for the first time in months, they slept certain of seeing the sun rise.

After a forty-eight hour rest, they marched to rear headquarters where a tremendous reception awaited them. Here they were given new clothes and a doctor treated their cuts and scars.

At Imphal all of the returning men were promptly pushed into hospital. They had lost an average of 15 pounds apiece. Most of them developed malaria. When they left the hospital Wingate saw that each man got five weeks' leave.

News of the expedition continued to remain a closely guarded secret. Groups were still trickling into Imphal daily. Every morning Wingate and his officers checked over the previous day's list of survivors and newly reported casualties. Considering the nature of the campaign and the results achieved, Wingate accomplished his mission at a relatively low cost in men and equipment.

At Imphal, the column commanders had the painful task of drawing up lists of the men believed taken prisoner. One

major headed his report: "Prisoners—presumed killed." A headquarters official wrote back acidly pointing out that there was no such designation in military terminology. The major penned a six-word reply: "Sir, we are fighting the *Japanese*."

When news of Wingate's raid was released, a correspondent went to interview him in New Delhi. He found him pacing up and down his room, stripped to a pair of shorts while he dictated his report. "If there's anything more strenuous than leading an expedition behind enemy lines," Wingate said, "it's writing a report about it."

That night Wingate and two officers met in Maiden's Hotel to celebrate. Wingate turned up in his old bush shirt and famous helmet. After dinner someone miraculously produced a bottle of French brandy and many toasts were drunk. Not a word was said about the campaign.

But as they rose to go, Wingate proposed a last toast. "Here's to the next time," he said. "Next time we cross the Chindwin the way home will be through Rangoon. We'll fight until there isn't a Jap left in Burma."

THE END

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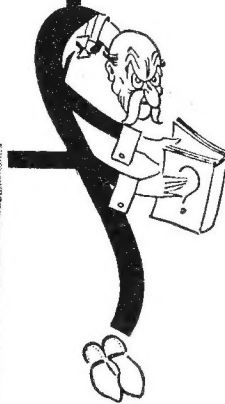
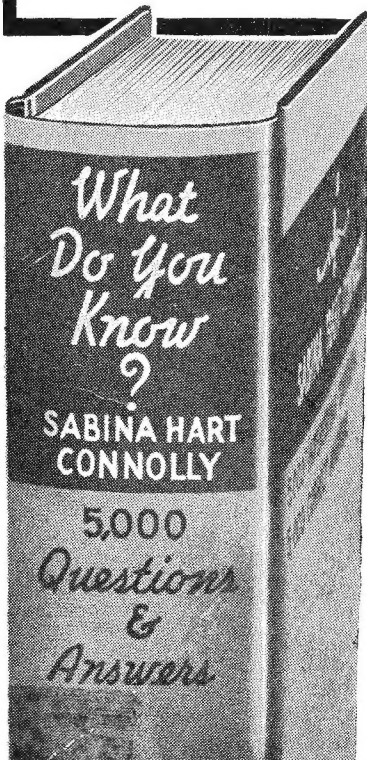
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